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**Address by the Hon. Alcee L. Hastings
President, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Member, U.S. House of Representatives**

**OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting
5 December 2005
Ljubljana, Slovenia**

Mr. Prime Minister,
Mr. Chairman in
Office of the OSCE, Mr. Rupel
Ministers,
Mr. Secretary General of the OSCE,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most pleased to address, for the second and final time in this capacity, the OSCE Ministerial Council on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly, which has and will continue to work closely with the governmental side of the OSCE to achieve our common objectives.

When the CSCE Charter of Paris was adopted by our Heads of State in 1990, it called for greater parliamentary involvement through the creation of our Parliamentary Assembly, which would involve Members of Parliament from all participating States.

Mr Chairman, I am proud to report that we have vigorously pursued that mandate. Since our creation, we have held more than fifty meetings involving more than ten thousand participants, including nearly six thousand Parliamentarians.

In addition to our Annual Sessions, Winter Meetings, Fall Conferences, and various seminars and other meetings, we have dispatched nearly two thousand Parliamentarians to lead OSCE Election Monitoring Missions in 74 elections.

At this very moment, forty-five OSCE Parliamentarians, along with colleagues from the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, are returning from Kazakhstan, where they led the International Observer Mission for the elections that took place yesterday.

During these past years, we have provided important forums for dialogue among Parliamentarians on OSCE issues and activities. Through our endeavors, dear colleagues, we have created in the national Parliaments of nearly every participating State, a cadre of Parliamentarians who know the work of the OSCE, who have *actually participated* in it, and who support the important work of this Organization.

We **have** brought added value to this Organization and we **have** done our very best to make a positive contribution towards the achievement of the noble goals of the OSCE.

Since this Council last met in Sofia, the OSCE has faced important challenges. The Parliamentary Assembly has always recognized the need for reform, and we have supported the efforts of both the Bulgarian and Slovenian Chairmanships in their efforts to achieve that reform.

As you may already be aware, the Assembly, working together with the Swiss Foundation for World Affairs, crafted a thorough report on OSCE reform to complement and assist the efforts of the Chairmanship and the Eminent Persons Group.

Regrettably, most of the very good and well thought-out recommendations of these two important groups have not achieved the required unanimous support of the Permanent Council.

As Parliamentarians who demand openness and transparency from our own governments, we lament the fact that similar conditions have not been implemented by the Permanent Council. It is my hope that the political leaders of this Organization, at the very highest levels in our capitals, will reflect on why the democratic practices that exist in our national governments and parliaments cannot be applied to the OSCE itself.

Today, more than ever, the Organization requires parliamentarians who support and defend its needs against the interests of others. The more our Parliamentarians are well informed and active and can claim that they have made an impact, the greater their readiness and their capacity to convince others.

A clear and unmistakable recognition of the Parliamentary Assembly's place and role in the OSCE is not simply a matter of prestige, but something from which the entire Organization will benefit.

Today the world is totally inter-connected. We can speak to our colleagues in Brussels or Bishkek or Baku in a matter of seconds. We can transmit words, pictures, and videos all over the world instantaneously.

However, as I recently said in New York at the IPU World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments, what we say is *only* important if we have the courage and the ability to *act* to make this world a freer, more secure, more prosperous place. We have the ability to do it, my friends, if we can summon the courage.

It is courageous to speak up. To say, "enough." To say, "this is unacceptable." Throughout history, people have given their lives and their fortunes for this very cause of freedom and human rights. We should pledge to do no less.

The attainment of human rights not only makes our efforts toward our other goals easier and more fruitful, but also legitimates the meaning of life in a safe and prosperous world. As Nelson Mandela has proclaimed, "There is no such thing as part freedom." If we truly value freedom, we must strive for complete freedom.

Mr. Chairman, the Parliamentary Assembly recognizes wholeheartedly that we must ensure that our focus is not entirely concentrated East of Vienna. Rather, our scope of interest must encompass the entire OSCE region.

Yet, the simple fact remains that the newest independent states that have emerged within the last fifteen years have been in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It is there that we simply cannot afford to ignore our commitment to the development of infrastructure, democratic advancement, and inter-regional dialogue, all of which are vitally linked to security and stability in the OSCE region.

During my mandate as President of the Parliamentary Assembly, I have tried to pay particular attention to these regions. It should be the aim of all OSCE member states to realize security and democracy go hand in hand, and insurgencies are less likely to happen in states where democratic institutions, freedom of dissent, and free and fair elections are permitted to exist and function free of governmental interference.

Shakespeare once wrote, "Men are as the time is." But as global policy makers don't we have the responsibility to look ahead of our times and foresee the possibilities that might allow us to build a future that provides security and justice for all, and at the same time fight to ensure that all of our citizens have the opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty and despair?

Experts agree that poverty is one of the leading causes of instability. And we have noticed that where poverty bears a face of permanency, democracy is always in jeopardy. Where we see poverty, we also see corruption, and disorder. Time and time again we have borne witness to the fact that terrorism thrives in disorder. The Parliamentary Assembly and, we hope, the OSCE Ministers, cannot ignore poverty, societal disenfranchisement, and the other multiplicity of causes of social unrest.

We must demonstrate to our citizens that we have the fortitude, determination, and open-mindedness to correct the structural injustices that face certain ethnic or minority groups in our states. We must also educate those individuals who remain oblivious to the fact that certain ethnic groups may have benefited, more so than others, because of an historical or societal uneven distribution of power.

As I come to my conclusion, Mr. Chairman, let me highlight the Parliamentary Assembly's continued leadership in the field of election monitoring, not only because of their obvious expertise and credibility with the media, but also, as shown by the recent experiences in Azerbaijan last month and Kazakhstan yesterday, the presence of parliamentary observers at elections during transitional periods emphasizes the importance of legislatures as institutions that must provide a balance to executive authority.

I congratulate the people and government of Slovenia for their stewardship of the OSCE over the past year. And I am pleased to welcome Belgium to the Chairmanship of the Organization. We look forward to working together with our Belgian friends in the coming year. Relatedly, you all should know that at the invitation of the Belgian Parliament, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly will be holding its Fifteenth Annual Session in Brussels next July. So, indeed, Brussels will be quite busy with OSCE activities in 2006!

Finally let me say that I am confident that despite the difficulties we constantly encounter, the OSCE will continue to pursue an aggressive agenda to help the broader Europe and beyond to become an area of peace, stability and cooperation.

Thank you very much.